

Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Gold Medal to Dorothy I. Height

March 24, 2004

Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker and Leader Frist, distinguished Members of Congress, I want to thank the authors of the bill that bestowed this high honor, Senator Clinton and Senator Levin and Congresswoman Watson. Thank you all for being here to honor such a fine American.

Since the American Revolution, Congress has awarded gold medals to the heroes of our country. And today we recognize a citizen who has helped to extend the promise of our founding to millions. We recognize a hero.

I'm so pleased to join with the Congress in honoring this good and gracious woman and the great life she has lived. And what a life it's been. If you know—in the presence of Dorothy Height, you kind of—she's such a calming influence. You realize you're in the presence of grace. But you've got to understand what she's done to realize that behind the grace, there's a will of steel and absolute determination.

She's been a leader and a witness to a lot of our great history. We've heard a lot of talk about the "Big Six." As Leader Pelosi said—I think it was Leader Pelosi—"I sure would have liked to have been in the room. I would have liked to have seen Dorothy Height interface with some of the giants of the civil rights movement." The truth of the matter is, she was the giant of the civil rights movement. They were interfacing with her. *[Laughter]*

She was there when they planned the march. She was a few steps away from Dr. King's great speech at the Lincoln Memorial. She helped integrate the YWCA. She was in the South during the sixties setting up freedom schools and voter registration drives. She was in Mississippi bringing white and black women together. She was in Birmingham in 1963 comforting the mothers of that city. Condi Rice was there

at the time. She's told me the story about what it was like. It would have taken a presence like Dorothy Height to instill hope and calm and confidence during that very troubled time. She helped create the Black Family Reunion. She's done a lot.

She's a woman of enormous accomplishment. She's a friend of First Ladies like Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Rodham Clinton. She's known every President since Dwight David Eisenhower. She's told every President what she thinks since Dwight David Eisenhower. *[Laughter]*

I find it really interesting that Dorothy Height has always stressed the importance of institutions closest to us, our families, our churches, and our neighborhoods. She understands that those institutions are important in shaping the character of an individual and, therefore, the character of the Nation. In her recently published memoir, Dr. Height wrote, "It is in the neighborhood and communities where the world begins. That is where children grow and families are developed, where people exercise their power to change their lives." Incredibly wise words from a strong leader.

Few Americans have done more than Dorothy Height to help their fellow citizens discover and exercise their own life-changing power. Dorothy has always remembered what her mother told her when she was a girl of 8 in 1920. She recalls, "My mother, always so gentle and so firm, put her arms around me. She said, 'You're a nice girl, Dorothy. You're a smart girl. And there are many things you can do.' " Mom was right. There was a lot of things she could do, and she did them, and America is a better place for it.

We're proud of you, Dorothy. We're honored to be in your presence. You're about to receive a gold medal, but perhaps the best medal we can give as a society

is to continue to work for equality and justice for all.

It's now my honor to join Speaker Hastert and Senator Stevens, the Senate—the President pro tem of the Senate, in

presenting this high award, this important award, to a great American.

May God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:02 p.m. in the Rotunda at the U.S. Capitol.

Remarks to the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce March 24, 2004

Thank you all. Thank you for that warm welcome. *Sientese, por favor. Bienvenidos.* I'm so glad you're here. Thanks for having me. [Laughter] I love to be in the presence of entrepreneurs, people who are willing to dream and to work to realize their dreams, which is really what America has been, is, and should be all about.

I appreciate the fact that it's the entrepreneurs here in America that take the risks and create the new jobs, do the hard work that's helping our economy go forward. You see, by pursuing your own dreams you're making the American Dream possible for more. You're helping to make sure that others can realize the potential of our country. Every day you show faith in what we stand for in America, and I'm here to tell you, the country is grateful to you. And I want to thank you for what you do.

What I want to do is talk about, today, the challenges facing our economy and how to put good policies in place to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of America—that's what we're really here to talk about—and talk about the need for—to make sure we've got a small-business sector that is vibrant, strong, growing, confident, optimistic about the future. And there are some things Government can do. Government can't create wealth, but it can create an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit can flourish. And that's what I'm here to talk about today.

I want to thank Hector—he's the Small Business Administration head—for joining me. I had the honor of meeting Hector, Sr., right before we came out here. Hector and I are lucky. We've both got good dads. [Laughter] So, Hector Barreto, Sr., I appreciate you here. He's the cofounder of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

I appreciate my friend John Snow, who is the Secretary of Treasury. Mr. Secretary, thanks for coming to share some thoughts. I appreciate your wisdom. He's a smart guy. [Laughter] He knows what I know, that it's best not to be thinking about economic theory; it's best to be thinking how to unleash the great creativity of the American people. It's the best economic policy there is.

I appreciate so very much J.R. Gonzales, the chairman and acting president of the U.S. Chamber. I want to thank Tina Cordova, the vice chair, for having me here. I see my friend Massey Villarreal. He's an old friend from Texas. I don't know if there's any *Texanos* here. [Applause] Yes. Tell them hello back home. [Laughter] Tell them I remember where I came from, and I'm not going to change because of polls and focus groups. I'm going to take the—I'm bringing the principles that I was raised with here. I'm going to stand on principle. I'm going to work as hard as I can for the American people, and I'm not going to change what I believe just because some are trying to change me.